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Filner, Filipino Vets to celebrate victory in the U.S. Congress

NATIONAL CITY, Calif. — Congressman Bob Filner will hold a rally and celebration at 3:30 p.m., Monday, January 12 at the Council of Philippine-American Organizations Building on 812 E Avenue, National City to celebrate the recent victory in guaranteeing veterans benefits for certain Filipino Veterans of World War II.

"We have achieved an historic victory in our fight for Filipino World War II veterans," said Congressman Filner. "But the fight continues — and I will not rest — until we have obtained full benefits for ALL Filipino veterans — not just those who are now citizens of the U.S. All Filipino veterans risked their lives for this nation, and we must give them all the same dignity, the same respect, and the same benefits!"

Dozens of Filipino World War II veterans are expected to attend the event.

On Dec. 16, President Bush signed into law a measure grant-

ing these veterans complete health care benefits, something that they and many others in the Filipino American community have been lobbying for decades.

Approximately 200,000 Filipinos were drafted to fight under Gen. Douglas MacArthur during World War II and promised citizenship and benefits by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1946, however, Congress passed the Rescission Act, denying recognition of Filipino combatants as American veterans. With it went the benefits that their American counterparts enjoyed.

According to Rudy Asercion of the American Legion War Memorial Commission in San Francisco, the Rescission Act was enacted in part because the United States felt it had done enough with a \$200 million grant to the Philippines following the war. The money was supposed to pay for services similar to the

United States' G.I. bill, which helped American soldiers transition into civilian life. Asercion says that money never reached the Filipino soldiers.

About 8,000 Filipino American World War II veterans live in the United States. The 21,000 veterans living in the Philippines do not qualify for the benefits. In the 57 years since the war, thousands of Filipino American veterans have died. Those still living are now in their 70s and 80s.

Filipinos have slowly regained their benefits, starting in 1990 when the Immigration Act allowed U.S. citizenship for thousands of Filipino veterans.

In December, President Bush signed two bills giving full benefits to Filipino Commonwealth Army veterans, Filipino Scouts and recognized members of the Filipino Guerrilla Forces who reside in the United States as citizens or legal permanent residents. Their spouses and widows are also eligible.